

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as indicated below.

1. (Currently Amended) An aqueous pigment paste having improved stability, free from binders and grinding resins, comprising based on its overall amount:

(A) from 15 to 25% by weight of at least one mica pigment;

(B) from 0.2 to 0.75% by weight of at least one nonassociative thickener comprising at least one methacrylate copolymer based on C₁-C₆ alkyl (meth)acrylate and (meth)acrylic acid;

(C) from 0.1 to 0.4% by weight of at least one organic amine;

(D) from 0.1 to 12% by weight of at least one nonionic surfactant; and

(E) at least 50% by weight of water,

wherein the aqueous pigment paste is free from binders and grinding resins and shows no settling after six months.

2. (Previously Presented) The aqueous pigment paste of claim 1, wherein the at least one mica pigment (A) is present in an amount from 18 to 23% by weight.

3. (Previously Presented) The aqueous pigment paste of claim 1, wherein the at least one nonassociative thickener (B) is present in an amount from 0.5 to 0.7% by weight.

4. (Previously Presented) The aqueous pigment paste of claim 1, wherein the at least one nonassociative thickener (B) comprises in copolymerized form at least two different C₁-C₆ alkyl (meth)acrylate monomers.

5. (Previously Presented) The aqueous pigment paste of claim 1, wherein the at least one nonassociative thickener (B), based on its overall amount, comprises from 40 to 60% by weight of methacrylic acid in copolymerized form.

6. (Previously Presented) The aqueous pigment paste of claim 1, wherein the at least one organic amine (C) comprises a tertiary amine.

7. (Previously Presented) The aqueous pigment paste of claim 6, wherein the tertiary amine comprises a hydroxylalkylamine.

8. (Previously Presented) The aqueous pigment paste of claim 7, wherein the hydroxylalkylamine is dimethylethanolamine.

9. (Previously Presented) The aqueous pigment paste of claim 1, wherein the at least one organic amine (C) is present in an amount of from 0.2 to 0.3% by weight.

10. (Previously Presented) The aqueous pigment paste of claim 1, wherein the at least one nonionic surfactant (D) is present in an amount of from 0.5 to 10% by weight.

11. (Previously Presented) The aqueous pigment paste of claim 1, wherein the water is present in an amount that is at least 55% by weight.

12. (Previously Presented) An aqueous coating material comprising the aqueous pigment paste of claim 1, wherein the aqueous coating material is selected from the group consisting of an aqueous effect coating material and an aqueous color and effect coating material.

13. (Previously Presented) The aqueous coating material of claim 12, wherein the aqueous coating material is an aqueous basecoat material.

14. (Previously Presented) The aqueous coating material of claim 12, wherein the aqueous coating material can produce a multicoat effect, or color and effect, paint system.

15. (Currently Amended) A process for preparing an aqueous effect or color and effect coating material, comprising mixing the aqueous pigment paste of claim 1 with at least one aqueous mixing varnish comprising at least one binder that is water-soluble, water-dispersible, or a combination thereof, in an amount such that the resulting aqueous effect or color and effect coating material comprises based on its overall amount:

- from 2 to 6% by weight of the at least one mica pigment (A);
- from 0.1 to 2% by weight of the at least one nonassociative thickener (B);and
- from 0.02 to 2.4% by weight of the at least one nonionic surfactant (D);

to produce a mixture; and

homogenizing the mixture.

16. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 15, wherein the at least one binder is selected from the group consisting of an addition (co)polymer of at least one ethylenically unsaturated monomer, a polyaddition resin, a polycondensation resin, and a combination thereof, wherein the addition (co)polymer is selected from the group consisting of a random (co)polymer, an alternating (co)polymer, a block (co)polymer, and a combination thereof, and wherein the addition (co)polymer is further selected from the group consisting of linear, branched, comb, and a combination thereof.

17. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 16, wherein the addition (co)polymer of at least one ethylenically unsaturated monomer is selected from the group consisting of a (meth)acrylate (co)polymer, a partially hydrolyzed polyvinyl ester, and a combination thereof, and the polyaddition resin and polycondensation resin are selected from the group consisting of a polyester, an alkyd, a polyurethane, a polylactone, a polycarbonate, a polyether, an epoxy resin-amine adduct, a polyurea, a polyamide, a polyimide, a polyester-polyurethane, a polyether-polyurethane, polyester-polyether-polyurethane, and a combination thereof.

18. (New) An aqueous pigment paste having improved stability, consisting of, based on its overall amount:

- (A) from 15 to 25% by weight of at least one mica pigment;
- (B) from 0.2 to 0.75% by weight of at least one nonassociative thickener comprising at least one methacrylate copolymer based on C₁-C₆ alkyl (meth)acrylate and (meth)acrylic acid;
- (C) from 0.1 to 0.4% by weight of at least one organic amine;
- (D) from 0.1 to 12% by weight of at least one nonionic surfactant;
- (E) at least 50% by weight of water,
- (F) 0% by weight of any binder or grinding resin, and
- (G) below 1% by weight of organic solvents,

wherein the aqueous pigment paste shows no settling after six months.